

"HOW I MADE MY DAD A SUCCESS AND MYSELF  
DISSOLUSIONED AT 40 YEARS OF AGE" 1/

"It seems funny to say that dad's success as a farmer may make me a failure at forty. My father and I are partners on a 320 acre dairy farm. I am 40 years old and have four children. Dad is 65. We are making a good income. Our closest friends think we made a grade-A father-son partnership.

"They don't know the uncertainties that do exist. Actually I am handcuffed, often resentful and discouraged. My wife is discontented. Our future is far short of dreams we once had. It is too late to make a break and start over. Security as limited as it is, means too much to a man in his forties with four youngsters.

"The basis of our partnership troubles can be simply stated. We are partners in labor only. Dad is still The Boss - I am still The Kid.

"Don't come to the wrong conclusion. Dad is a grand fellow and highly respected in the community. He has been good to me. At 18 I had my own car. After I was graduated from high school he paid me going wages and a bonus in good years. At 30 I became a partner in the farm operations and one-half ownership of stock and equipment, but have never been given the opportunity to buy interest in the land or buildings. We never argue over profits, in fact, dad is the manager.

"The thing farmers treasure most is their independence; the traditional freedom to build their dream on their own land. I never had this freedom, do not have it now. Dad is proud of his success. He is proud of our farm business. His pet boast is that he owes no man and never will again.

"As dad grows older he grows more complacent about things as they are, more reluctant about investing in improvements, more resistant to change.

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1/ A story true in some father-son farm partnerships according to John E. Moore, Extension Economist, Farm Management, Ohio State University.

The inefficient old barn is still solid. It is good enough. The new tractor with laborsaving attachments I would like to have is nonsense. Dad says, 'Look what we have done with the two tractors we have.' Dad is right many times when it comes to questioning expenditures for buildings and machinery.

"I don't suppose I can blame dad. He worked like a demon during his early years to retire a mortgage and buy land and implements. He took a terrible beating during the depression and saw his savings vanish when the banks closed. I can understand why the \$25,000 or so he has in the bank is sacred, how debt is unthinkable to him now, and how 'modernization' of one of the best farms in the county sound like nonsense.

"If dad doesn't have a 'will' my two sisters and one brother, who have been gone from home for 15 years, will receive equal inheritance from the farm business that I have helped build. However, a 'will' that could be in force now can be changed tomorrow. I would like to have more financial security on the future land and building ownership. The shrinkage of dad's estate from settlement costs could be terrific since farm property has appreciated steadily over the years and probably will continue.

"Dad may say, 'Heck! I made it. Why can't you, with a ready-made farm?'

"That is a little harsh. Dad got his start with much less capital expenditures and labor was more available at low wages. Machinery was simple and cheap. He had all the farm income to manipulate; not just half. Even then he went deeply into debt to win out. Today I face a future dad never knew, I must think in thousands where dad thought in hundreds.

"What dad eligible now for social security income I am hoping he will make it possible for me to move into a position of more management and financial security. He is definitely slowing down, but he still drives

himself unmercifully. This means labor input is really not on a 50-50 basis as it used to be. I need his continued council even if he might decide to ease out of his major roll as manager.

"I do not intend to give the impression that dad and I spend our days growling at each other. We laugh a lot. We take a few days off together during the hunting season. A few times a year we get away for a weekend of fishing.

"But on summer nights when we sit looking over our acres we see different pictures. Dad sees the sound, prosperous 1940-model farm he has built up with a lifetime of hard work and finds it good. I see the fine stock, the efficient buildings I probably never will have. The price I would have to pay for this appreciated land resource in my folks estate in order to buy out my sisters and brother seems impossible.

"My domestic situation is a constant worry. It shouldn't be, with four swell kids, a devoted farm raised wife, and no immediate financial pinch. But Jeanne has a problem even more irritating than mine, and I can't blame her when she blows a fuse occasionally.

"When we were married 17 years ago there seemed to be plenty of room in the big old farm house for two families. But there isn't room for two women under any roof.

"There was never any blow-up. Both mom and Jeanne are sensible and tolerant and good friends. There was just strain. To this day I don't know exactly how it happened, but when a new neighbor moved to town, Jeanne and I rented the house a mile down the road. Just the house; not the land.

"It is a comfortable house, but that is about all one can say for it. Hot air furnace heat; big, old-fashioned kitchen; a huge, dreary bathroom that was once the bedroom off the kitchen; floors and woodwork with the wear and scars left by a family of seven children, now grown. That is the kind

of place my still pretty, 38 year-old wife calls home. Most of her friends have built-in kitchens with all conveniences, oil heat, sparkling bathrooms; all the things important to a woman's pride.

"Jeanne doesn't complain much, but it socks me hard when occasionally she wanders around with a yardstick; measuring, speculating and 'making believe.' I know what she has in mind. A picture window, draperies, carpeting, a kitchen like one she has seen in a magazine, a bathroom that needs no apology.

"We have some money saved and at our age we should start getting these things. But they are just as far in our future as the farm pond, the irrigation, and the purebred dairy herd I want and cannot have. Aren't there some alternatives that could be to the advantage of dad and myself?

"So there you have it. Two people, approaching middle age, able to afford nice things, who probably will have to mark time for a few more years before living their own lives. What is the answer? I don't know. I do know income security is important for the folks, but we're hoping arrangements can be made soon to safeguard my contribution to the farm real estate and the total farm business."